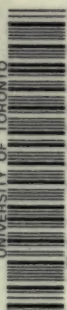


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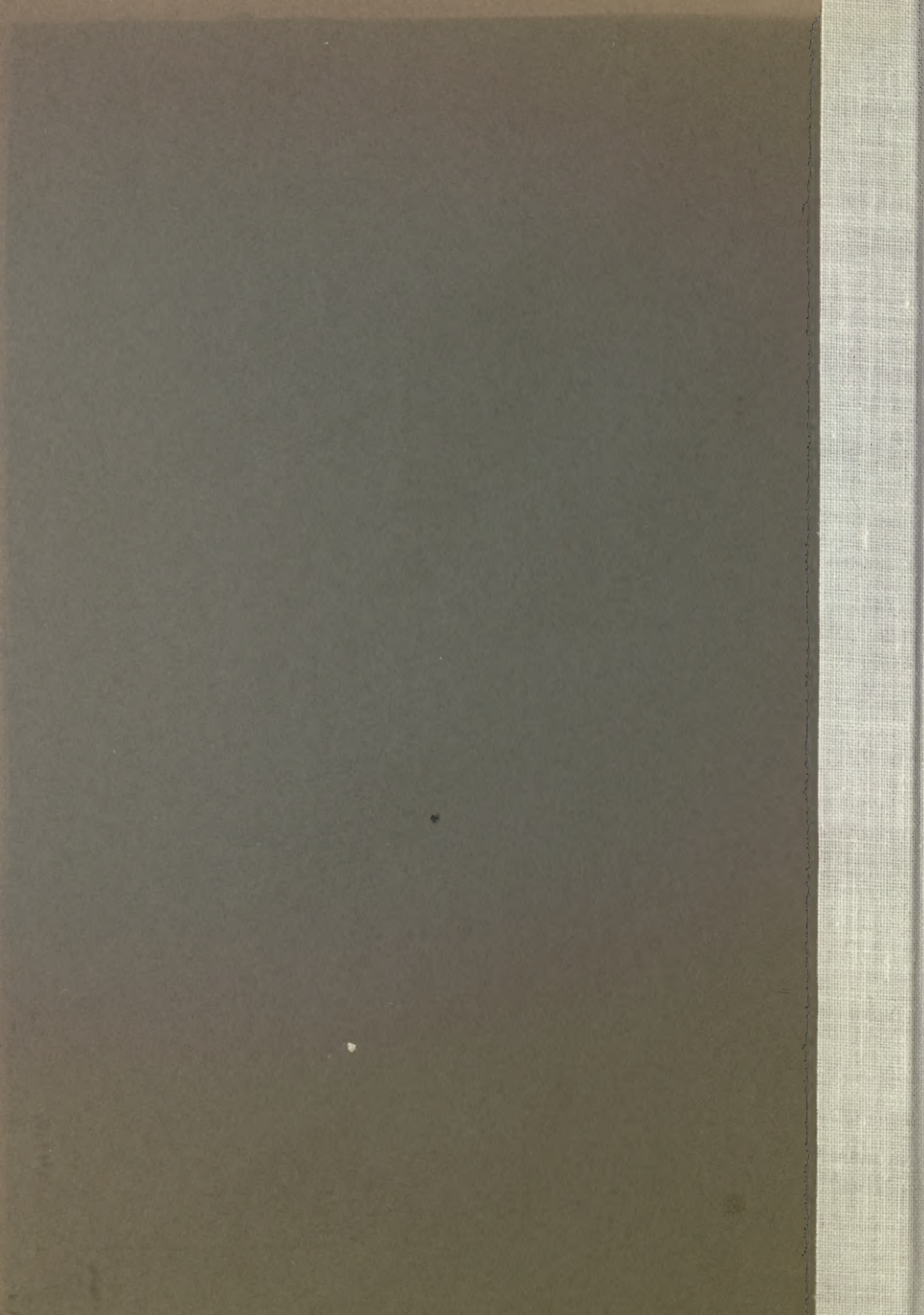
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Young, Andrew
The death of Eli

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The
DEATH OF ELI
and other poems

By
A. J. YOUNG



London JOHN G. WILSON

The Death of Eli
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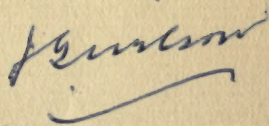
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Boaz and Ruth and other poems

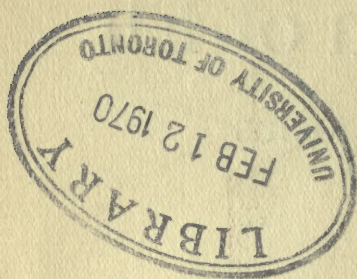
The Death of Eli

and other poems

By
A. J. Young

London
John G. Wilson
77 Queen Street, Cheapside
1921

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. G. Wilson', with a long, sweeping underline.



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To my Mother

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To a Violet in Autumn

O PILGRIM in thy purple hood,
That strayest late into the year,
When not in meadow or wet wood
Is one of thy companions here ;

The celandine with starry head,
The cuckoo-flower and cuckoo-pint
Are here no longer, but instead
The harebell and the grey horsemint.

And now the long convolvulus
Flings his white trumpets on the hedge,
And saw-wort and blue scabious
Grow round the rutted stubble edge.

Thou, born again beyond thy time,
Speakest of woods, dark-leaved and wet,
And brown ploughed earth and silver rime,
Melting on early grass ; and yet

Thou touchest thoughts within my blood
That make thy coming doubly dear,
O pilgrim in thy purple hood,
That strayest late into the year.

Youth

TURNING away his lovely head
And with a trembling on his lip,
Youth took me by the hand and said,
"Here ends our long companionship ;
Though I may walk with other men,
With you I shall not walk again.

"Now when the soft-voiced crickets sing
At sunset, and the evening star
Shines like the first stray flower of spring
Over a sea of lavender,
Now is the solemn moment when
Joy blossoms by the steps of men.

"For you the golden coin is spent ;
The singing lark has left the sky ;
And you must find a calm content
To turn the leaves of memory,
Where Time wrote with his iron pen
The things that may not come again."

And then I laughed, "O not to-day,
Some other day is time enough ;
When little children cease to play
And other men leave off to love,
Then may you say and only then
You shall not walk with me again."

O Heavenly Love

O HEAVENLY Love, that in a wind
Didst breathe on One of womankind
In that white town upon the hill,
On womankind Thou breathest still
In such sweet sense that I can say,
I fear not, Lord, Thy darkest will,
If love go with me all the way.

For though my days grow dim as night
And nights seem longer than the light
To sleepless eyes, because hot pain
Touches my flesh or heart or brain,
I smile towards a break of day,
Redder than roses bruised with rain,
If love go with me all the way.

And though the subtle hands of Death
Should interrupt the tides of breath
And set his cobwebs on these eyes,
I, who have looked to other skies
Beyond the night, beyond the day,
Know that the living flame shall rise,
If Love go with me all the way.

Love

In giving love you gave me all,
Your hand, your heart, your soul ;
If other women give in part,
Yet you have given the whole.

If then you ask me how I know
We shall not wholly die,
I answer that that love of yours
Is of too fine a sky.

A love of such dimensions, dear,
So long, so deep, so broad,
Is such a love as sure must share
Eternity with God.

Daisies

THE stars are everywhere to-night,
Above, beneath me and around ;
They fill the sky with powdery light
And glimmer from the night-strewn ground ;
For where the folded daisies are
In everyone I see a star.

And so I know that when I pass
Where no sun's shadow counts the hours
And where the sky was there is grass
And where the stars were there are flowers,
Through the long night in which I lie
Stars will be shining in my sky.

Autumn

WHEN light wakes late and early fails ;
And where the catkins swung their tails
Like caterpillars on the trees
Nestle the nuts in twoes and threes ;
A late owl hooting from the wood
Chills my premonitory blood.

And when the hedges, thick with haws,
Are strewn with the loose harvest straws,
And sullen hips upon the brier
Betray the rose's sepulchre,
The stripped fields in the moonlight glow
White with imaginary snow.

How can I know, how can I know
But something of this winter's snow
Shall fall on me till I become
Dumb as the snow-heaped earth is dumb,
And I myself this year shall be
Part of the year's mortality ?

Never again to wake at spring
And see the blackthorn blossoming,
And flowers that later days forget,
Primrose and ruffled violet,
Coltsfoot and gold-rayed celandine,
Outspreading with a silvery shine ;

And, where the beds of bluebells lie
Like water that reflects a sky,
That white flower veined with lilac blood,
The three-leaved sorrel of the wood,
The same that to St. Patrick was
The Godhead in a house of grass.

Flowers are the dull earth's conscious eyes,
Full of sweet hopes and memories,
Making—O Immortality,
Surely thy image here I see !—
A little outspent sun and rain
Mix with the dust and live again.

Song for Autumn

COME, love, for now the night and day
Play with their pawns of black and white,
And what day loses in her play
Is won by the encroaching night.

The clematis grows old and clings
Grey-bearded to the road-side trees
And in the hedge the nightshade strings
Her berries in bright necklaces.

The fields are bare ; the latest sheaf
Of barley, wheat and rusty rye
Is stacked long since ; and every leaf
Burns like a sunset on the sky.

Come, love, for night and day, alas,
Are playing for a heavier stake
Than hours of light or leaves or grass ;
Come, love ; come, love, for sweet love's sake.

White Violets

THE hooded violets of blue
That drink the rain of April skies,
These I know well ; but who are you
That in white resurrection rise ?

These bring us fragrant thoughts of them
Who sleep beneath the heavy earth ;
But you of some white Bethlehem
Where they are come again to birth.

The Bee-orchis

I saw a bee, I saw a flower ;
I looked again and said, For sure
Never was flower, never was bee
Locked in such immobility.

The loud bees lurched about the hill,
But this flower-buried bee was still ;
I said, O Love, has love the power
To change a bee into a flower.

At Night

OUR love is like that broken moon,
That blossoms on the edge of night,
Holding the fullness of her noon
In a dim smothered light.

Love, though love's springtime comes and goes,
We know that summer waits us yet ;
It is the sweetness of the rose
That scents the violet.

Beauty and Love

BEAUTY and love are all my dream ;
 They change not with the changing day ;
Love stays forever like a stream
 That flows but never flows away ;
And beauty is the bright sun-bow
 That blossoms on the spray that showers
Where the loud water falls below,
 Making a wind among the flowers.

The Death of Eli

(The scene is the courtyard of the Temple outside Shiloh. Eli is seated by the door. Having waited all day for tidings of the battle to which his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, have gone with the Ark of God, he has fallen asleep. Priests are offering a sacrifice in the Temple.)

SACRIFICE-SONG OF PRIESTS

(from the Temple)

CRASH the brazen cymbals of high
And leap, ye priests, on a nimble foot ;
Strike sackbut, harp and psaltery ;
And, O ye sweet flute-players, put
Lips to the flute and the double flute.

Take flowers, take flowers in your hands,
Flowers and a white cart-rope to throw
On the young horn-budded steer that stands,
Lowing as votive oxen low,
When the loud ram-horns and sheep-horns blow.

Go forth, go forth, ye priests, and guide
The flower-crowned victim in ; and slay
The sacred victim and flay the hide,
Leaving the priests the hide ye flay,
While the pipes and the shrill-voiced bagpipes
play.

Piece by piece give the entire
Victim ; let no portion fall
Apart from the fire ; give to the fire
Liver and heart and caul and all
The fat of the liver and heart and caul.

Crash, cymbals, crash ; higher and higher
Leap, ye priests, from the holy ground ;
Sound, O lute, and, loud-voiced lyre,
Sound and, O sweet pipes, resound,
As the dancing priests go round and around.

ELI (waking)

Where is my staff ?
For I would judge by the sweet smell of flowers
It is the hour of sacrifice. Alas,
They go their ways and I am left alone.
O that it might be with me as it was
With Jacob, when, an old old man and blind,
His children gave him in the cave at Dothan
The coat of little Joseph, and the smell
Brought back the light of day to his dead eyes.

NURSE enters.

NURSE

There sits the old blind priest upon his stone,
As drowsy as a serpent in the sun,
Sucking the heat into his withered blood.

ELI

Who speaks ? Is it some woman from the town,
Come to the Temple carrying in her basket
A pigeon or a little raisin cake ?

NURSE

Eli, Eli—

ELI

Good nurse, reach me thy hand ;
For I too will arise, I, the old priest,
And weaving almond blossom on my staff
Join in the holy dance.

NURSE

Be still, O priest ;
Is it a seemly thing for one so old
To dance with the young men ? But tell me rather,
For I am come to learn, if any tidings
Has reached the city.

ELI

One who came at noon
Reports that when the priests brought down the Ark
To Ebenezer, where the people lay,
So great a shout went up that the bright air
Writhed as in pain and singing larks fell dead
Around the camp ; and when it touched the ground
The whole earth shook like an unsteady sea,
And clouds of smoke poured forth and through
the smoke
Men saw the eyes of the twin Cherubim,
Shining like stars on water.

NURSE

Is God's voice
Dumb in thy heart, O priest ? or wilt thou speak
And, speaking, call some blessing on the land ?

ELI

God's voice has long since perished from the land.

NURSE

God's voice may speak again if thou wilt speak.

ELI

Who knows if, speaking, it will bless or curse ?

NURSE

No word can speak against the holy Ark.

ELI

The Ark ! Ah me, I tremble.

NURSE

Speak, O priest ;
The word of God is hanging on thy lips.

ELI

Alas, what evil ecstasy is this ?
My head is light as air ; my blood is fire ;
A spirit rushes on me with black wings,
And old dead murders bleed before my eyes.

NURSE

What mad moonbeam has slipped into his mind ?

ELI

O dawn that rose in blood upon the door !
She stooped upon the threshold but the priest,
Cutting the body of the concubine,
Sent out the bleeding flesh through all the land.

NURSE

Why dost thou speak of old unwholesome things ?

ELI

Well of Labonah, where the woman danced,
Crushing the crocus with their naked feet
And tossing on the wind their hair like smoke
That flies behind a torch, a bitter draught
Thou gavest unto Shiloh on the day
When through the vine-leaves rushed the ambushed
men
And seized each man a maiden with his hands.

NURSE

His mind is like a dismal cave of bats.
O priest, hast thou no softer word to speak,
With her, thy daughter-in-law, brought to her
bed,
And with the Philistines this day—

ELI

Ah me,
I see that dragon rising from the sea ;
He strikes his claws in the Judean hills
And gapes with empty hunger on the land.
O land of Judah ! O the Ark of God !
My head swims round and round ; I fall, I fall.

ELI faints.

NURSE

Alas, these words of cursing will destroy us.
It is a piteous thing indeed—O God,
What is that dreadful crying from the city
Like the shrill wailing of dishevelled women ?
What do they cry ? The Ark of God is taken !
The priests are slain ! The priests are slain ! I fear
The sword that slew them is a two-edged sword,
That slaying them will slay my mistress too.

NURSE goes out.

INCENSE-SONG OF PRIESTS

(from the Temple)

When God drove out from Paradise
That Root of Life, our Parent Man,
He gave him for his sacrifice
The seed of every precious spice
Mixed by priests in the incense-pan.

And the sons of Joktan took them thence
And planted Mount Arabia
Beside the sacred Pison ; whence
The merchants bring sweet frankincense
And myrrh and cassia-lignea ;

And cistus yielding labdanum
That shepherds pluck from the beards of goats ;
Almug-wood and galbanum
And sap of the opobalsamum,
Brought on the seas in wind-blown boats ;

And mastic-gum that overflows
When the bark is cut by a sharpened stone ;
Spikenard, mace and lign-aloes
That make the desert a Syrian rose
Where the scowling camels journey on.

All that comes by labouring seas
Or sky-encircled caravan,
Barks and gums and powders—these
With salt and oil and ambergris
We burn in the golden incense-pan.

ELI (waking)

I smell the scent of flowers, not like the scent
Of vines or almond blossom in the spring
Or the white crocus, but a strange sweet scent
Like honey in the wind ; and that they say
Is sign that one is on the point to die.
Then let them not do with me as they did
With Joseph, when they tore his entrails out
And filled the dark red hollow of his ribs
With honey and sweet spice ; for that is why
More than all other gifts the Lord abhors
The gift of honey in His sacrifice.

NURSE enters.

NURSE

Ichabod, Ichabod, O Ichabod,
She called him Ichabod before she died.

ELI

Ah me, is it the nurse's voice I hear ?

NURSE

She shuddered on the bed and, Ichabod,
She cried, O Ichabod, O Ichabod.

ELI

O bed, hast thou brought forth these ill-matched
twins,
Birth to the child but to the mother death ?

NURSE

Together these two fought, mother and child ;
They fought together, she with bitter cries,
He plucking at the blood about her heart
Blindly ; and when we stooped and drew apart
The child, she lifted up her head and cried,
Ichabod, Ichabod, O Ichabod.

ELI

And I, the priest of God, cry, Ichabod ;
The glory is departed from the land.

NURSE

Too surely did this raven croak before.

ELI

O ye who lift your robes to tread the grapes,
Stamping the bubbled clusters till the blood
Rushes in rosy foam about your feet,
And not the vats yet full and full enough
And ye not weary of exultant sin ?

NURSE

Who can run after this unbridled tongue ?

ELI

And thou, O Shiloh, where the short-legged ox,
Goring the flowery garland with his horns,
Is led by white-robed priests along the streets,
Can the rich slaughter of a thousand bulls
Or all the snowy pigeons of the land
Drown the shrill cry of blood beneath thy stones ?

NURSE

He comes, he comes, the messenger of death.
The death of his two sons will slay the priest ;
I cannot bear to see the blind man die.

NURSE goes out.

ELI

The blind are in a living dream ; but God
Has blessed their blindness with one gift of sight,
To know that all, the seeing and the blind,
Alike are in a dream ; for some men rise
To follow in a dream a track of blood ;
Others to dig for treasure in a dream ;
Others to dream they go upon a journey
By land or sea ; others to seek the love
Of wife or child, though that too is a dream ;
All struggling on by strange and devious ways
Of good or evil to the hidden end,
None knowing that the end is not in man
Himself, but in the mind of God alone.

MESSENGER enters.

MESSENGER

What man art thou staring with these dead eyes?

ELI

Eli, the priest of God, and thou—

MESSENGER

O priest,
I bear a load of tidings on my tongue—

ELI

My sons—

MESSENGER

Thy sons are slain in battle.

ELI

Ah!
My sons are slain. Why then, my sons are dead.

MESSENGER

The ark of God is taken.

ELI

The Ark, the Ark!
Alas, why wilt thou murder an old man?
Dost thou not see that I am old and blind,
An old old man almost as old as God?
My sons are slain—the Ark of God is taken—

ELI falls back and dies.

MESSENGER

The priest is dead ; the voice of God is dead.

MESSENGER goes out.

LIBATION-SONG OF PRIESTS

(from the Temple)

When father Noah smelt the rain,
He built his ark of gopher-wood ;
And the ark rose up like a trumpeting crane
And sailed over city, hill and plain
And seas beneath the Flood.

And the year went by him where he sat
And watched the floating rains prevail
Over the world ; and after that
He saw the back of Ararat
Rise like a heaving whale.

And he planted grapes, and stem and bud
Sprang up and began to overrun
The holy ship ; and banks of mud
Like wallowing monsters of the Flood
Recked in the crimson sun.

And Noah was first to set his foot
To tread the grapes and fill the vat ;
For every vine that yields her fruit
Is child to that ancestral root
That grew on Ararat.

And this, the crowning gift of the feast,
We splash on the double-horned shrine ;
For first the hyssop-waving priest
Offers the blood of the votive beast
And last the blood of the vine.

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